



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Transforming Urban Blight into Community Gardens

Vacant lots overgrown with weeds could soon be transformed into community gardens bursting with fruits and vegetables.

Acting on a [motion by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas](#), the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted Tuesday to begin the process of establishing an Urban Agricultural Incentive Zone (UAIZ) program in Los Angeles County.

By turning vacant lots into community gardens, it would reduce urban blight while increasing the supply of fresh produce grown in urban areas.

The program is authorized by the California Urban Agriculture Incentives Zone Act or AB 551, and requires the owner of the vacant lot to enter into a contract with the County to dedicate the property for agricultural uses.

In exchange, the owner would get a [property tax discount](#).

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said the benefits of the program would outweigh any revenue losses to the County.

“I see this as one tool in the toolkit to address the significant food desert issues prevalent in urban areas throughout the County,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “The fiscal cost of establishing a UAIZ program are likely to pale in

comparison to the anticipated public health, environmental, quality of life and economic benefits for the participants and the surrounding communities.”

His motion drew support from several advocates of urban gardening, including Matthew Van Diepen, founder of Homegrown Gardens. He declared at Tuesday’s Board meeting: “We are ready to turn blighted areas of our city into hubs of life that will foster nature, community and the economy through community gardens and production farms.”

Francesca de la Rosa, policy director for Women Organizing Resources Knowledge & Services WORKS, said the program would help address one of the biggest obstacles to community food growing efforts – access to land.

“This program will be a win for gardeners, property owners and, most importantly, neighborhoods across this County that stand to benefit from an increase in access to healthy fruits and vegetables; the creation of new green, open spaces; and renewed neighborhood pride generated from beautiful community garden projects,” she said.

Luke Ippoliti, with the nonprofit Meet Each Need with Dignity, said the program would address the county’s high rates of poverty, food insecurity, diabetes and obesity. Meanwhile, Breanna Hawkins, a policy and research fellow at the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, estimated that every \$1 invested in community gardens yields about \$6 worth of vegetables.

“We recognize the many economic, social, social, health and environmental benefits that urban agriculture can bring to the county, as well as the tax benefit it can bring to property owners,” she said.

According to County Assessor, almost 57,000 parcels of land may be eligible for the program throughout Los Angeles County, including almost 8,000 in unincorporated areas governed by the Board. Those living in incorporated areas cannot participate until their respective cities adopt a resolution.

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